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AUTHOR Stewig, John Warren
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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to illustrate how children can consciously examine the composition process and experience a set of problems designed to improve their writing ability. An approach to writing is outlined which is based on the assumption that writing is a skill that can be learned and improved upon. Examined are such topics as the development of skills; the importance of literature as a model and teaching method; the treatment of literature; characterization; language and characterization; point of view; the sense of place; and ideas about plot. It is argued that specific exercises relating to point of view, describing environments, parallel plot construction, and plot completion lead to deeper understandings of the writing process. In this program, children encounter all types of literature as they respond to the challenge of developing writing skills. (RS)

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Helping Children Be There, Then.
Using Historical Fiction as a Base for Children's Composition*

by
John Warren Stewig
University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

Did you share Will's astonishment at discovering that their farm was a way station on the underground railroad?[29] Did you see the regal curve of the staircase which floated down to the foyer in Carolina's house?[35] Did you wonder in fear how William would escape the public hearing?[19] If you were thus involved, it is because you were caught up in the writer's ability to create characters, settings and plots that were believable, compelling and memorable. In each case, if you responded intensely to the experience, it was because of the writer's skill, a skill which helped you to be there, then. The author shared with you an experience that was admittedly vicarious, and yet as real as something which happened to you this morning. How does a writer accomplish this? How can we help children develop writing skills which will enable them to take their readers there, then?

While such mature writing skills are beyond the mastery of elementary children with whom we work, yet they suggest direction for a composition program. Further, thinking about the nature of adult writing skills, particularly as exemplified in children's literature, suggests a new approach to composition instruction. This approach to writing is different than approaches commonly found in elementary language programs.

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*Speech given at the Eighth Annual Conference on the Language Arts in the Elementary School, Atlanta, March, 1976

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Creative Writing Today

Many elementary curricula make provision for composition. Children are provided a variety of experiences designed to motivate them to write. This happens in kindergarten when a teacher draws children together after a trip to a fire station and encourages them to dictate their reactions. It also happens in sixth grade when a teacher uses a film, or perhaps a picture, to encourage children to compose, writing their individual reactions. In between, children encounter many different motivations to write.

Though most children do write as part of the elementary language arts program, only rarely are they asked to reflect upon the act of composition itself. In typical programs children express themselves when doing creative writing and give carefui attention to such mechanical considerations as punctuation and spelling when they are doing practical writing. Seldom is much attention given to helping children shape and reshape their writing to make it more effective. Conscious thought about the process of composing is infrequently part of writing programs. The purpose of this paper is to illustrate how children can consciously examine the composition process and experience a set of problems designed to improve their writing ability.

A New Approach

Do children who experience a writing program based on creativity as the most crucial element turn out to be effective writers? Results are at best equivocal. Teachers who have tried this approach are enthusiastic, though other who read what students write have expressed doubts.[8] Evans is typical of those who are dubious about current approaches when he comments on the:

> impression in word and idea, incoherence of structure . . . the almost compulsive injection of wholly irrelevant personal attitudes into every piece of writing the student does.

He sees the reason for this as:

> a mistaken emphasis on "self-expression" and "imaginative" writing, to the virtual exclusion of guided excercises, however elementary, in such forms as objective description, comparison, contrast, definition and explanation.

The problem, he continues, is that the child has:

> not been shown how to construct a simple plot, or create a character, or write interesting dialogue, not led, in short, to an early awareness that all writing needs direction and control . . .

Evans is not alone in wondering if current approaches to composition really reach a major goal - the creation of better writers and writing? Other sources are equally critical of the quality of writing children do when they leave elementary school. [23]

A New Approach

Because of such concerns, the question must be raised: Would another approach to teaching writing lead to the goal identified - better writers and writing? The approach to writing described here is in some ways quite different than the approach commonly used in schools now. Is it better? There is some informal evidence that it is, and samples of children's works included here demonstrate the quality of writing done by children exposed to this approach.

The fundamental assumption on which this program rests is that writing is a skill. Skills can be learned and, after being learned, they can be improved. Children you work with, at whatever level, possess composing skills. The composing skills of young children will be oral. The composing skills of older children will also include writing. The teacher's job is to further develop and expand upon the skills already possessed by students.

This assumption does not negate the importance of self-expression or creativity. Certainly no sensitive, perceptive teacher will consciously thwart individuality and self-expression. The question is one of emphasis. In this program developing writing skills is seen more crucial than the encouragement of self-expression. The program does not deny the emotional values that come from the writing process, or the importance of respecting and enhancing the child's self-concept and creativity. Rather, the program simply emphasizes the cognitive and skill-development as more important in this particular segment of the general elementary curriculum.

How Are Skills Developed?

The program, described at length elsewhere,[25] uses a recommended set of examples from the wide range of children's literature as the basis for writing sessions. These books are simply recommendations. From the wealth of literature available any teacher can select other, equally useful selections to share with children, once he or she understands how the writing program works. The examples used here are primarily historical fiction, particularly appropriate in this bicentennial year.[22]

The reason for basing this writing program on literature are:

- If children know and understand good literature, there is the opportunity for them to transfer something of what they know into what they write.
- If children are immersed in literature and encouraged to talk about it and raise questions about it, they may become better writers by using literature as models on which to build.
- There is some indication that children, especially in the intermediate grades, write more effectively as a result of vicarious experiences. One author reports that these children turn from firsthand experiences as motivation for writing to respond to less immediate motivations. This justifies basing some writing problems on such historical fiction as is described here.

The foundation of the program is a rich, constant experience with literature continuing throughout the entire elementary school. Children

are encouraged to think consciously about what they read, to speculate upon the nature of literature, and to hypothesize about the writers' purposes in writing as they did. This program does not ask children to passively absorb and "appreciate" but rather to interact with the literature selections the teacher presents.

The Importance of Literature

Most elementary teachers understand the values that accrue as a result of sharing literature with children. Many teachers share books with their children sometime during the day. Frequently, however, this sharing is somewhat unplanned. One writer has commented that, while there is a wealth of literature for children, there is a dearth of planned sequential programs of literature designed to acquaint children with the range of styles, genres, topics and approaches.

Since a major component of this writing program is literature, it is imperative that teachers be well acquainted with children's literature in all its forms, so that what they select will advance the goals of the program. Teachers familiar with all types of literature, as well as with the specific goals of this program, can choose books that will be both enjoyable and also an asset in helping children improve their writing.

An intensive experience with literature is crucial to the success of this program. It is important that the teacher reads to the children every day. This means not only at the primary level, where the practice is fairly common, but also at the intermediate level, where it is less common. Twenty minutes per day spent reading to children will result in better writing as they unconsciously assimilate aspects of what they are hearing.

Treatment of Literature

The fact that this writing program is based on literature does not mean teachers should attempt to dissect what they read, belaboring aspects of construction, style, figurative language, and vocabulary choice. Indeed, this would spoil the chance for children to appreciate the literature they are hearing. Some of the literature will be discussed; other selections will simply be read and enjoyed. Still other literature will later be used consciously as a basis for specific writing experiences. But in leading any discussion the teacher keeps in mind the need to draw out from children their reactions to what they read, rather than consciously implant large amounts of cognitive information. Teachers start informally with very young children:

-What part of the story did you like best? Can you tell us why?
-Which part was most exciting or interesting?
-Which of the people in the story did you like best? Can you tell us why?

Later the questions become more complex:

-Why do you think we don't like that character?
-What does he or she do that makes us feel that way?
-Why do you think the story happened where the author made it happen?
-How did the author convey the relationship between the characters without simply telling us?

Characterization

In addition to the reading input, children experience a sequence of writing problems designed to give them insights into writing as a process. One major area of concern is characterization.

Who can ever forget the delight of knowing plucky Bilbo,[26] comfort-loving Ratty,[12] or adventuresome Miss Hickory?[1] They are memorable, for the authors brought them to life from the printed page. They ceased being

simply characters in a story and became, instead, real to us, alive and vital beings about whom we cared. Caring, we remembered them. The ability to characterize, to create with words a description of a person that remains with the reader after the story is finished, is one mark of a successful writer.

A major concern of this program is helping children develop the ability to create characters. To learn to describe the physical and psychological aspects of people (or animals) about whom they are writing is a valuable ability for children. Yet without conscious help few children develop naturally the ability to describe a character with economy, effectiveness, and enthusiasm.

Often characterization in children's stories is flat, presented in general terms or types, as for instance occurs purposely in old folktales. Such limited characterization is acceptable in folktales, where the plot receives major emphasis. Similarly, in children's first writing, description of characters is often limited. We do not want children's ability to characterize to stop here, however. Our goal is a fuller, richer characterization in which the child uses physical and psychological descriptors to build a unified, memorable entity. To accomplish this we must plan a sequence of experiences with characterization.

In planning such a sequence the teacher chooses books to read that present a wide variety of characters: male and female, young and old, rich and poor, real and imaginary. The books are read to children and savored. Sometimes the selections are discussed; at other times they are not.

We are not content with simple physical characterization only, as we want children to explore more involved dimensions of personality. It is

crucial to consider such questions as:

-What is the character like "inside"?
-How does he/she feel about things that happen in the story?
-How does he/she react to people, ideas, and events?

For this reason, we share with children examples of fuller characterization. Discussion may be necessary to point out what the author is doing.

Language and Characterization

In many instances character is enhanced or further delineated by the language the characters speak. To help children think about the ways dialogue brings characters to life, you might acquaint them with the work of Lois Lenski.[18] Marguerite De Angeli has also written books useful for studying the ways language defines characterization. Thee, Hannah[6] makes the point quite effectively.

In addition, books are available in which the language of the characters changes. Especially appropriate this year is a book about Abraham Lincoln, whose life and language changed as he grew older. The author gives samples of the dialect Abe spoke as a child:

"One two three--I drapped one, Pappy."
"Kaint we go now?"
"No, Mammny," Abe replied, "jest sayin' the lesson."
"Kin we start tomorry?"

This contrasts with the polished, slightly formal dialect he spoke toward the end of his life.

'Are you not overcautious when you assume that you cannot do what the enemy is constantly doing?" "If I know my heart, my gratitide is free from any taint of personal triumph."[17] . .

This is adult language, of course, different than the shorter sentences of a child spoken earlier in the book. It is also, however, a very polished style of speech, learned by Lincoln who knew that the dialect of his home was not appropriate in the different world into which he had moved. Older

children enjoy trying to create and maintain characterization through language - a story by a fourth grader attempting to do this is included later in this paper.

Point of View

Another aspect of characterization is point of view, a concept to which children should be exposed. Much literature is written in third person, in which a narrator tells what is happening to the characters. A different approach is first-person writing, in which the author speaks as if he or she were the character; this allows much freedom as well as providing some restraints. Children should hear both types of narration so they will begin to see the range of possibilities each provides and the inherent disadvantages of each.

Often stories you share with children will be told in the third person, an economical way of conveying to the reader much information that simply could not be conveyed had first person narration been used. A follow-up activity to any story told in third person is to ask children to rewrite part or all of the story from that character's point of view.

Second grade teachers recently used Martin and Abraham Lincoln,[3] a fiction work about a poor family struggling to survive after the father is captured during the war. A chance encounter between Martin, the young boy, and Lincoln, makes the family's life easier. After listening to the story, told in third person, children rewrite it as if they were one of the characters. Laura wrote:

> I am Amanda. My two sisters are Anna and Maria. My brother is Martin. My brother Martin thinks he is taking my father's place. My father is a prisoner. He didn't do anything wrong. He is a prisoner in the Civil War. We are poor because my father is gone. The things my mother wanted very much was sugar, flour, eggs and butter.

Our friend Snowden is very kind to us. He gives vegetables to us. Snowden's donkey's name is Nellie. One day Snowden, Nellie and Martin went to Washington, D.C. to sell vegetables. Snowden left Martin on the steps of the White House. While Martin was sitting on the steps, President Lincoln came out and talked to him about our father.

Note the beginning attempts at conversation in the story Jim wrote:

I am Martin. My father is an army prisoner. Every day I go with Snowden, who is a vegetable seiler. I always get one of each vegetable, because my mother is very poor.

One day Snowden took me to Washington, D.C.. He had to sell some more vegetables. He left me on the steps of the White House. In a while, President Lincoln came out. He said, "Who are you?" "I am Martin." "I know your Dad." Mr. Lincoln sat down. I sat on his lap. He told me about his father. A nail was in Mr. Lincoln's shoe. I found a rock to pound it in. Mr. Lincoln said the army would help my dad. Then Snowden brought me home.

In the following story, Nancy assumed the role of the main character:

One day I was wearing my new army suit. It was very bright color blue. I was walking around the block when I saw my friend Snowden. I asked him if I could go along to Washington with him. He said, "Why do you want to go to Washington?" I said, "Because my father is in prison, and maybe someone has heard about him." "O.K., then, come with me." When we got to Washington, Snowden tied his mule to a tree and said, "Stay here and watch the capital. Maybe someone will come out who has seen your father." I waited and waited, and then I went over to the capitol steps and sat down. Then Abraham Lincoln came out. I stood up and saluted. Then Abraham Lincoln said, "Now boy, what brings you here?" I did not answer him. He said, "You know what? I have a nail in my shoe." And I said, "Let me try to get it out." So Abraham Lincoln took off his shoe. I got two stones and pounded the nail out. Abraham Lincoln put his shoe on, and we started to talk about my father.

Fourth graders were asked to rewrite the factual story of Susan B. Anthony,[13] as if they were one of the characters. Heidi retold the story in diary form.

Diary of Susan B. Anthony

December 9th, 1822

Today is my birthday, and I am three years old. The only present I got is this diary from my parents. I have to help mother cook,

clean, sew, wash, iron and care for the garden and the chickens now.

April 28, 1838

I'm eighteen today, and am now a teacher. It's Friday and I just got paid. It was only two dollars, and I'm disturbed about that because men get paid more than women. I'm glad I'm a teacher instead of being a servant or working in a factory.

August 19, 1840

I attended a meeting tonight against slavery. I made a speech and said that I didn't agree with slavery. I plan for another meeting tommorrow.

January 18, 1849

I have the flu and I can barely speak. I've had it for a month already. I only had a bowl of soup today.

September 1, 1851

They're starting a movement for women's rights and I'm glad. I met Elizabeth Stanton and Lucy Stone at the meeting today. They agree with me. I've had poor food and a sleepless night, worrying about our work. I have a bad cold, too.

May 2, 1865

Slavery is finally done with. I wish they had let women have their rights, too. Now all the men can vote, but the women still can't. It seems like women will never have any rights.

October 11, 1872

I voted today, and was arrested. I was taken to court, and proved to be guilty. I was fined one hundred dollars. I said I wouldn't pay even one cent of the fine. And the truth is I never will.

In one fourth grade, the teacher shared the story of John Billington,[2] an obstreperous little boy whose family came to America on the Mayflower. Lee recounted the long adventure of John when he was taken to an Indian village.

My name is John Billington. I'm always getting into trouble. One day I said to my mom, "I'm going to live with the Indians." "You won't like it, John Billington," she said. "I don't care. I'm going to tell Squanto," I said. So I told him. He said I

wouldn't like it. He said, "Indians not live the same as white men, food not same, clothes not same, you not like it." But I still ran away.

That day I heard something behind me. I looked but no one was there. Then I heard something again. This time there were two Indians in back of me. They took me on a trail. We got to the water. Now I knew where we were. The Indians pulled a canoe out of the underbrush. We got in the canoe. They were going the wrong way. I kept on pointing toward Plymouth, but they kept going to Cape Cod. Then I thought to myself, "When the canoe gets to shore, I will jump out before the Indians can get out." Well, it didn't happen like that at all. The Indians got out before I even moved a leg. They took big steps so it was hard to keep up. Just then I saw the Indian village. When everyone saw me they looked at my clothes, my hair, my shoes. Just then I saw a man eating deer meat. Then a person gave me some deer meat. That night I slept in the chief's house.

In the morning my shoes were gone. I looked outside. There was a little Indian boy wearing them. I got into a fight with him, but I got my shoes back. The chief made a sign for me to come to him. He patted a mat beside him. "Thank you," I said, and sat down to put my shoes on.

Everyday I tried to tell them I wanted to go home. They listened and shook their heads. I couldn't make them understand. I lived in the chief's house, but I missed my mom and dad and Francis. One day I walked out of the Indian village hoping to find the seashore. A strong young brave brought me back to the village. I didn't know how I would ever get back home again.

I had been with the Indians almost a week when I saw all the excitement in the village. A woman led me into a house. She hung a mat over the door. I tried to look out, but she pulled me back. I heard a man outside, talking in Indian language. I knew the voice. Before the woman could get me, I pushed the mat away and ran out the door. "Squanto," I cried. There was Squanto talking with the chief. "Take me home," I said. "Yes, yes," said Squanto. Squanto and the chief talked together awhile. Squanto went away. The chief and some of his braves made ready to take me. They put beads around my neck and feathers in my hair. Two tall braves put me on their shoulders. Chief Aspinet walked behind us. They came to the shore, where there was a boat. In it were my father, Master Hopkins, Governor Bradford, and Squanto. I wanted to run to the boat but I couldn't. The Indians waded into the water and put me in the boat. Then Chief Aspinet gave a long speech. Then we exchanged presents and were off on our way home.

In the next story, Sara, assuming the role of John, begins mid-episode with imagined dialogue.

> "Humph!" said Francis. "You can't fire a musket. It's bigger than you are yourself."
>
> "I'll show you," I said. We went to the gunroom. Sometimes it was locked. Today it opened with a push. "It's dark!" I said. Francis ran away and came back with a lighted candle. On the floor there were muskets wrapped in sailcloth. There were also bullets and gunpowder.
>
> "Show me how to fire a musket," said Francis. I unwrapped a musket. "You load it like this," I explained. "Then you put a match to it . . . . Francis watched. He held the candle. "Don't get so close," I warned. Just as I said this, the powder caught fire. The gun fell out of my hands. I fell to the floor. I had burned my hand. Francis and I had a good place to hide - but alas - over the knee again. When we got ashore I was in plenty of trouble there, too, but that's another story.

Sharon also rewrote an episode as if she were John.

> My name is John Billington. I always get in trouble. I got some new shoes when we left England. Love Brewster always calls them Big Shoes. She said they looked as big as boats. When we were playing soldiers on the ship, I broke my toy musket over Love's head. Love started running after me. I didn't look where I was going, and I ran right into Master Hopkins. He said, "What are you doing?" I said, "I broke my toy musket over Love's head," and as fast as I could I ran into my room. I got stale meat, and terrible water for supper. Before I went to bed I told Love that I was sorry. The next morning I got to be captain of the soldiers and I was glad.

In the next story, Craig experiments using language to create a character. We may think of the attempt as stereotyped*, but it illustrates a child's beginning effort to establish character through language. Note the consistency with which the dialect is maintained throughout the story.

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*Dialect simulation is only one of several possible ways of having students write in various voices. If you feel students would draw the wrong influences from dialect simulation, you could choose different means toward the same goal, i.e.: writing as Mom, as Dad, or some ethnically anonymous character.

> Hi, me Squanto. One day me with John. Me watch ship sail away. Me ask John, "Why ship sail away?" He tell me ship don't belong to him. It belong to England. Me tell John, "Me go to England." John ask, "How you go to England?" I tell him, "White man take me on big ship." I hope to myself he don't ask me the story. "Me go to London. White men very good to me." "How go home?" John ask. "Captain John Smith bring me back. I go to see mother, father." John ask if I surprise them. "I didn't see them. Before get to village, White man take me to Spain." I hope to myself again that he won't ask me any more. "What for?" ask John. "Slave," I say. "Were you a slave?" ask John. "No, good men of church save me." John ask if I see mother, father. I don't answer. It too sad. I don't think he meant to hurt my feelings because him didn't know. But me still his friend.

These stories illustrate one of the strengths of first person narration: it is direct, simple and fresh, because it is the character him/herself talking. More information of a personal nature can be presented in shorter compass than if such information had to be described. The disadvantage is that nothing can be included that wouldn't logically have been thought or spoken by the person telling the story. These stories indicate that children are beginning to understand this writing technique. More practice is needed, but the initial attempts are encouraging.

An Exciting Place to Be

Another crucial composition skill is the ability to create setting. Have you ever tramped through the woods on Haw Bank, searching for hazel nuts and blackberries with Keith and David?[28] Or have you ever been jostled around in the darkness of Gideon's pocket?[10] Or stood over the wood stove helping Ma make curds?[28] If you've delighted in any of these experiences, you'll never forget the specific sense of place the author created. Each of these environments is so distinct, so unlike any other place you've experienced, that the memory lingers long after the book has been read.

One of the writing tasks we set for children is description of environment, for successful writers give us a clear and vibrant understanding of where the action takes place.

To help children learn to write effective descriptions of setting, we plan:

1. extensive exposure to literature, which the teacher reads to the children, and
2. writing experiences based on literature.

To provide the first type of experience, the teacher reads literature that evokes setting through a variety of means, and talks with children about how the writer created a sense of place.

Some settings give us memorable visual images. Elizabeth Enright helps the reader understand several locations she describes. Among these she writes about the outside of an old house: "on one of the square porch pillars a crop of fungus stuck out like turkey feathers."[7]

Some writers give us clear and distinct sound images. Sometimes, especially in books for young children, sound images are conveyed through repeated refrains. In The Enormous Sweater[14] the eccentric little old lady's incessant knitting is accompanied by the "click, clickity, click" of her needles, and the "creak, creakity, creak" of her rocking chair. The use of these sound words serves two purposes. They help children see how a strong rhythm enhances the story line, and they are also used to describe elements in the setting.

In Behind the Magic Line, a book appealing to intermediate grade children, we get a clear impression of a setting established primarily through sound images.[16]

Less often do authors give readers spatial or tactile images. These need to be pointed out to children. For spatial images, read either The

Mousewife or Mouse House.[11] Designed for younger children, both contain fine descriptions of space. Tactile sensations describing the setting are included effectively by Craig in the book, What Did You Dream?[4]

Olfactory aspects of settings are less usual than other descriptors. Enright uses this device effectively in telling us that "The breath of the house came out to them. It smelled old."[7] A more extended olfactory image is included by Snyder in her book, Eyes in the Fishbowl.[24]

For the assignment related to historical fiction, teachers read the setting description of Eliza's house in the book, The Red Petticoat,[2] a story of the revolutionary era. Following the reading of the first chapter, third grade children discussed the images the author used in giving a sense of what Eliza's house was like. Children identified ways in which her home was alike and different from their own homes. Then children were asked to observe very carefully one room in their own home that evening. The following day, children were given time to write a description of a room in their home. Andy wrote the following:

> When I walk through my door I see a neat thing, my new wallpaper. It is covered with curved stripes. The colors are blue, red, green, and white. In my room I have two beds. My two beds both have head boards and they both have foot boards. The head and foot boards are painted magenta. Next to the beds are two brown shelves with a pot and other neat things. Going a little deeper in my room . . . oops, I bumped my head on the wall. My dad is going to cork one of my walls, so I can tack of pictures and notes. Going to the far back of the room I have a window. My mom has ordered me new blinds for my windows.

Margo included both visual and sound images.

> Clip, clop, clip, clop. That's the sound you hear when you walk up the stairs to the bedrooms. The first room is loud red, and really sticks out. Next is a soft warm yellow room, and it's a quiet room. My room is the best. If you listen real hard, you the heat go bump, bump, bump. The blue carpet seems as if it were welcoming you. It's nice and cozy, even if there is no furniture in it. The windows have light brown, paneled, criss crosses on them. You can hear the wind howl and the snow blow.

> My room is so cozy that I think at night for almost two hours I will sit on my cozy bed, lay back on my cozy pillow and read my cozy, cozy book and suddenly fall asleep.

Ann included spatial, textural and size descriptors.

> The family room is so neat to walk in. It seems so big and wide to me. The walls are made of stone, and the stones are white. On the left side there is a big table with a lot of stuff on it, and next to the table is a gigantic piano. It is out of tune, but it plays alright. My cat always jumps up on it. There are two tables near the piano that are wooden. In the back of the room there is a couch and a raggy rug. Next to the couch there is a stereo that has a radio in it, and a place where you could put tapes.

Developing Ideas About Plot

It is necessary to develop some rudimentary ideas about plot with children, because interesting characters and an evocative setting are of little final effect unless something exciting happens in the story. Children are fond of action, so it is easy to interest them in plot problems. The writing problems included in this program are designed to give children conscious insights into ways plot may be manipulated by writers.

A simple, effective way to begin developing understanding of plot with young children is to introduce the idea of parallel plot construction. After telling or reading a simple folk tale or author-written story, the teacher leads a discussion, the purpose of which is to help children recall on a basic cognitive level what happened in the story. Plot summarization is a skill children will find useful in reading programs; developing the skill this way also helps them understand that plot is an element of story construction that can be thought about. After a review of the plot, children are encouraged to dictate their own version of the story.

We are asking children to do what Eldonna Everttts suggests when she recommends we ask, "Can you construct a story in which the plot follows

the same path as the one which we heard?" Evertts comments on such parallel construction, using Alice Dalgliesh's story for older children, The Bears on Hemlock Mountain.[5]

Fourth grade children listened to that story, and afterwards analyzed the plot. The main character, sent to fetch something which is needed from some distance, accomplishes the task but on the way home encounters a danger, from which the character is saved by an adult. Those of you familiar with the particulars of the story will note the abstract way the action is summarized. This is done to provide a facilitating framework, a structure around which children can arrange whatever details they want to include. Stories which resulted from this experience include the following by Bob.

> Once upon a time there was a boy named Mark. Now Mark's mother was a poor cook. So when she found out that Mark's great great uncle was dead, she invited everyone over for dinner because they were all so sad. Then Mark said, "Remember, you can't cook very well." "Little do you know," Mother began. "Your uncle left me a recipe, and it is in a brick in the chimney of his house. You must go get it."
>
> So the next day, Mark went to his uncle's house. He climbed up on the roof to look at the bricks in the chimney. What did he do, but meet a Dodo Bird? He decided the safest place was in the chimney, he climbed in, and stayed for an hour. His mother got worried, so she went to the uncle's house. When she saw the Dodo Bird, she climbed up on the roof and hit him on the head with a broom and killed him. Then she helped Mark out of the chimney and took him home. When they got gome she gave him a bath.
>
> Mark had found the recipe in a brick inside the chimney. His mother got the recipe which was for DodoBird Stew. When all the relatives came they wondered how she had become such a good cook.

Craig used the parallel construction technique to present his main character with a human, not animal menace.

> Once upon a time in the summer, Jonny was sent to buy a bottle of vanilla. He had to take the boat out of the shed and row across the water. The river, called Pirate's River, was one

mile long. It was called Pirate's River, because long ago pirates had used it.

Jonny took the boat out of the shed, and dragged it to the water. The boat made a trail in the soft ground as Jonny pulled it.

Now everyone knew that maybe, just maybe there were pirates. But Jonny forgot about pirates because he was so busy. So he jumped in his boat and started to row. His oars went plop, splash, plop. Soon he got to the shore where the store was.

Jonny climbed up the shore to the store and bought the bottle of vanilla. He walked out of the store, and climbed down the hill, and into his boat. Jonny started to row back across the river when he saw a pirate ship!!

Jonny had to do something. He remembered that he could sink his boat and swim under the boat. So he did it. He swam under water, outside the pirate's ship, and returned to the forest where his house was.

Kim's story, divided into chapters by the author, incorporates going up and down a hill, as in the original story by Dalgliesh.

When Peter Goes to His Grandma's

One day Peter got sent up to his room for breaking a window by throwing a snowball through it. Later his mother said, "Come down stairs and go to Grandma's for me. Put on your snowsuit, mittens, and scarf. "Mom, what am I supposed to get?" "A pound of butter, Son," said his mother. "Do you know where Grandma's house is?" Peter knew, so he set off.

Chapter Two

"Harold, I sent Peter over Indian Hill," Peter's mother told his father. "I heard that there is a loose tiger there," said his father. Clip, clop, Clip, clop, Clip, clop, went Peter's boots. "Well, now that I am up the hill," said Peter, "all I have to do is go down." Just then Peter saw a shadow in the snow. Then came another shadow, and another. Peter thought, "What is that?" Out popped the shadows. It was only a family of rabbits. Peter was so relieved that he petted the rabbits. Then he kept on walking to Grandma's house.

Chapter Three

Peter walked down the hill. When he got to his grandma's, he knocked on the door. "Hello, Peter," said Grandma. "How did you get here," she asked. "I walked," Said Peter. "You walked! Well, you must be hungry. Come and have a cookie."

said Grandma. He hoped she would bring brownies, too. After Peter ate his cookies, he asked for the pound of butter. Grandma gave him the butter. "Now, you had better get going, or your mother will be worrying," said Grandma. "Why don't I take two pounds, in case mother runs out," asked Peter. "O.K.," said Grandma, "but now you hurry home."

Time for the news on the radio. "Now for today's news report: A tiger has escaped from the zoo!" Clip, clop, Clip, clop, Clip, clop, went Peter up the hill. Then Peter saw another shadow. It was the tiger.

Chapter Four

Peter ran, and the tiger ran. Peter climbed a tree and the tiger climbed the tree. Then Peter thought of an idaa. "Why don't I throw some of the butter down? Then the tiger would take the butter and go away." So Peter threw one pound of butter down to the ground. The tiger licked up the butter and went away.

"Harold, I think you should go and look for Peter," his mother told his father. "Yes, I'm putting on my boots, said Peter's father. Peter thought, "How am I going to get down?" When he heard his father call, "Peter, Peter," he called back, "Dad, I'm here." "Where?" "In the tree." "Son, what are you doing up there?" "It's a long story," said Peter "I'll tell you when we get home." So they got home safely and Peter told his story. And his mother never sent him on another errand.

Heidi intersperses parenthetical statements to talk directly to the reader, in the following narrative.

The Horrible Adventure

One day a long time ago there was a little girl who was four years old. It was summer and the family was very poor. But at least they could pick berries and nuts, and kill the poor little creatures of the woods. The girl's name was Amy and she was happy in summer because she didn't have any chores. Amy ran around all day with the sun beating down on her. The flowers were always gay and bright around the little tan house, and at night they all sat around the cozy fire.

One morning it wasn't the same as usual, because her lazy father was cooking and her busy mother was in bed. Everything was topsy turvey. Finally she found out that her mother was ill, and that she had to go into the deepest part of the woods to pick berries or else they wouldn't have any fruit. (Amy's father hunted all day, but usually he didn't catch anything because he didn't really try.) Amy was horrified when she heard that she had to pick the berries, because ferocious

mountain lions, cougars, and boars roamed there. Her mother always used one of the firles that hung over the door, but Amy couldn't use one, so she had to be careful.

It was a sunny morning and she was skipping through the woods part of the way to cheer herself up. (Back home her father was just leaving for the woods worrying about her.) She finally came to the piace she wanted. Frantically she looked arourd for a berry bush, but no berry bush could be seen. Then she had an idea. She looked around at the trees and there was a tree with the ripest berries she had ever seen. She didn't have any trouble climbing it, because she had climbed trees since she was two.

Amy had to hurry because she didn't want to meet any hungry animals. The bark of the tree stung her little bare feet, and when she got to the branch with the most berries she began picking like mad. In exactly three minutes her basket was full.

She climbed down the tree and started home. All of a sudden, Amy heard a grunting noise. Out of a thicket came a wild boar. It started charging at her. When it stumbled, Amy ran with all her might, but the boar was still close behind her. Amy climbed up a tree and the boar kept on, going straight ahead. Amy jumped down and ran the other way and bumped into her father. (He had come to take her home because he had found five animals. He had tried today because Amy's mother was sick.) The boar had found out that he had been tricked and had turned around. He was crashing through the woods when Amy's father shot him. He dragged him home without meeting any other animals, and they had boar meat for supper.

Plot completion experiences work well with all ages. In the process of writing an ending to a story, the child is challenged to fit details of characterization and setting into a logical sequence of actions. A teacher shared the story, Thy Friend, Obadiah,[27] for the convincing portrait it includes of a curious, independent Quaker child growing up on Nantucket island. Obadiah is pestered by a gull which follows him around, and by his brothers and sisters who tease him about his friend. One day the gull mysteriously disappears. The teacher read the story to the line: "Every night Obadiah looked out of his window, but the sea gull didn't come back." Then she asked the first grade children to dictate their endings for the story. Craig said:

Obadiah didn't see the bird all winter. In springtime there were hundreds of sea gulls, but not his special one. Then one day Obadiah saw his friend again. He was so happy he cried.

Chris dictated the following story, including a casuality statement, and a pleasant concluding turn of phrase.

Obadiah's mother gave him money, and he went to the store and bought some flour. On the way home he slipped and lost his penny. The bird never came back until spring. It was too cold, and the bird went to a warmer place. When the bird came back, Obadiah's heart was full of joy.

Lynn's story includes conversation and a dialect ending.

The bird came back in spring. Obadiah was so happy he ran up to the bird and started playing. Then he said, "I don't care if you follow me anymore." The next day Obadiah's mother gave him more money to buy flour. The bird followed him and Obadiah was happy again.

The end

The writing done by third grade children illustrates how effectively they can create a sense of being somewhere else, at another time. The teachers shared the story of Cowslip,[15] a young black girl destined to be sold with her sisters on the auction block. It was a busy day, the town square was crowded, and through carelessness, Cowslip was not shackled with the rest of the slaves. Suddenly she realized that no chains held her. What would she do? Mark has included a wealth of small details which make his plot completion remarkably realistic.

She was there alone. It was cool. She stood quietly as a breeze swept across her yellow bandana. She started to run. Her bandana fell off and she was unaware of it. Her new master saw her run. He was wearing blue jeans with gray suspenders. Cowslip noticed he was after her. She ran even faster, so fast she made a sharp turn and lost him. He was nowhere to be seen. Cowslip stopped and glanced nervously to see if anyone was behind her. No one was in sight. She was very tired, and very, very hungry.

It was quiet and cool. It was fall. The leaves were red, yellow, orange, green and brown. A chipmunk scampered through the pretty leaves. She was free. She was also very scared. Cowslip heard the clattering of horses feet. She started to run again. She ran past trees, houses and animals. She got tired and hid in a

tree. The slave hunters rode past her. She was safe again. She noticed her yellow bandana was gone. She wouldn't find it again. Her best possession was gone.

Cowslip wondered about the children and Mariah. She wondered and wondered. "What should I do?" She repeated that question over and over again. She told herself she must go on. It started to drizzle as the cool breeze swept on. The moon came out. It was full that night. So was her head! It was full of ideas. "It's a bitter evening," she said to herself. She hid in the trees and soon fell asleep. She was cold as small drops of rain fell down her back. She had a dream. It was about Mariah and the youngsters. She and the youngsters were happy and free.

Then she awoke that day at sunrise. She walked on and ran into a friend. Her name was Cathy. She also was a slave. She wore blue pants and a white shirt. She was running away, too. They walked together. Cathy was older than Cowslip. Cowslip told Cathy about the youngsters and Mariah. Cathy promised they would all be free, and go on the underground railroad to the north. Would this be true?

Michele incorporates dialogue into her completion of the story marked by stacatto syntax.

Cowslip didn't know what to do. She decided to depart with the group of little children. She took her yellow bandana and tied it real tight (so it would not fall off). Then she ran as fast as her legs would carry her. She said to herself, "I'll be back in a whipstitch." She ran about two miles. She looked back nervously. No slave hunters were there. Cowslip ran still farther. She saw a barn. She went in, and saw it was safe. She decided to stay the night. She laid in a pile of cold and damp hay. She took some tattered old potatoe sacks and put them over her cold and shivery body. When she was rested and found food, she went back to the slave pen on a dark and gloomy night. She got the group and ran. When they got back to the barn she made five small beds to sleep in.

In the morning they started to move north to Illinois. They escaped to the next station. Every hour or two, the youngest, who was only ten, got tired and asked, "How long to the next station?" Cowslip answered, "We'll be there in a whipstitch," and she was right. The conductor said, "One more trip and you'll be free." Tears of joy ran down their cheeks, especially Cowslips. "We've got to be on our way." Everyone agreed.

Cowslip opened the door happily. She heard something. It was a big gruff sound of a slave hunter's dogs. She closed the door scared, with trembling hands. Everyone asked, "What's wrong?" Cowslip said in a whisper, "Slave hunters!" Everyone

repeated what she said. One said, "What should we do now?" The conductor said, "Go down awhile, and there's a creek. Go quietly into it till they turn back." The children did as they were told. The slave hunters left. So did the dogs. The coast was clear on their way to freedom. And guess what, they made it. They heard some people talking about a home for Negros. Cowslip asked someone for advice. She got her advice and used it. She went to the home. In 1861 the Civil War started. In 1865 it stopped. The north won. Cowslip and the children were free to leave the home. All slaves walked off their planations.

In Margo's completion of the plot, Cowslip relies on human and divine help to make her escape.

Cowslip had a choice. Should she take it or shouldn't she? It was a big decision. She would like very much to go back to the youngsters, but she couldn't see their crying faces. Some might be sold already. This had to be all a dream. She just couldn't be sold, and then the owner walking away and nobody with her. "This can't be true. No, it just can't. I can't part from the youngsters," she said to herself.

She decided she would take a chance and run as far as she could back to the plantation to see Mariah. But what about the youngsters? What . . . what . . .? She began to stumble for a moment. "I can't leave them here with that dreadful auctioneer." What in the world should she do? Her mind was filled with all kinds of frustrations going around in circles and then getting tied into a knot. She sat on a hard, bumpy rock with tears in her eyes. She never thought of her life in this situation. she had her yellow bandana in her sweaty hands. She had a thought, oh, oh, no, it wouldn't work. She sighed. Wait, it might work. She took a second thought. "Yes, if I could possibly get the children and sneak past all the crowded people . . ." She could probably get at least one or two youngsters. But if something happens, what should she do? Well, "I don't know," Cowslip said. "I'll think later. I have to be fast, or I might not get any back."

Before she took one step forward, she heard a voice. What was it? Where was it? And who was it? She talked, and it talked back in a way. She thought of Mariah, but that didn't make sense. She looked around. Not a soul in sight. She thought of God. Yes, it was God, and she felt him. She prayed very hard as she went to find the youngsters. She passed five men and two women without being caught. Then she purposely smothered (sic) herself in the crowd. She suddenly jerked into two youngsters, and saw a strange boy her own age. He said, "Come with me. I will take you back to my house. My father is not well. Maybe you could help him. My house is not far. It is straight down there." "O.K., let's go," said Cowslip. They walked to

the little house. It was covered with slimy moss, but it was perfect. After about seven years, Cowslip got married to the boy. Cowslip died at the age of seventy. Her last words were, "Thank you, God," and that's the story of Cowslip.

Lenore's completion of the story incorporates dialogue noteworthy for the realistic quality of the interchanges between Cowslip and the slave boy.

> Cowslip decided that she was going to escape! She went quietly out the door, across the street when she suddenly saw Colonel Sprague. She ran behind a rock and waited until Colonel Sprague went away. Now she would have to be very careful and if she saw anyone coming she would hide begind a bush, or a rock, or anything to hide behind. When she finally couldn't walk any longer she sat down on a log near by. As soon as she had rested her legs she heard someone crying. When she came a little closer, she saw it was a slave boy crying. She walked a little bit closer but the boy didn't notice.
>
> "What's the matter?" she finally managed to ask. "Well, me and my father . . ." "My father and I," Cowslip corrected, but the boy didn't pay any attention to her. "Me and my father ran away and they caught him, and now he's going to be hanged." "Well, why don't you come with me?" Cowslip suggested. "O.K.," said the slave boy with tears trickling down his cheeks. So they walked together.
>
> Once they came to a woods that had nice clean water in the rivers, and big juicy berries that grew on bushes. Once they almost got caught. Cowslip and the slave boy heard some hoofbeats. It was probably a white man! "Quick, let's hide behind a rock or something!" said Cowslip in a panic. "There is not rock or something," said the slave boy. Cowslip thought in panic what they could hide behind. "Run, run as fast as your legs can go!" shouted Cowslip. They ran pretty fast but the white man saw the last of slave boy's foot turn the corner. "Run away slave," thought the man. But when Cowslip turned the corner she saw a pile of leaves. "Quick, cover your self with these leaves," said Cowslip. Meanwhile the white man thought to himself, "The slave is probably going to trick me and go the other way, so I'll just wait here and trick the slave." And then when he saw that the slave wasn't coming, he left.
>
> They went through a lot of adventures but not any of them were as scary as that one. Once Cowslip heard a slave talk about an underground railroad, and now was the time she found one. Underground railroads are people that hide slaves and keep them safe. Well, here was her chance. She went in, down the basement and hid until the next night came. Then she'd go to the next railroad house and to the next.

One day the Civil war started and the same time the slave boy got very, very sick. Cowslip did all she could do to make him better, but he couldn't live any more, and one day he just died. Now she was alone, but not for long. She found a bird eating bird seed. The bird suddenly flew away with Cowslip following after her. She finally saw an old cottage in the distance. She walked up and opened the door, and saw an old lady huddled up in a corner. When the woman saw the girl, she got up and got Cowslip water and something to eat. They became fast friends. They both fixed up the cottage and after a while the Civil War ended, and all the slaves were free! When Cowslip found out the good news she said to herself, "I'm free, free at last!

Summary

This approach to writing, which presupposes a rich literature input, presents children with a planned sequence of composition experiences designed to help them think about the process of writing. The program is founded on the hypothesis that conscious attention to the composing process will result in better writers and writing. After wide-ranging experiences with literature chose to exemplify aspects of writing, children are asked to respond to a set of writing problems including characterization, setting, and plot, among others. Specific exercises relating to point of view, describing environments, parallel plot construction and plot completion, lead to deeper understandings of the writing process. Literature examples used today are historical fiction, though the program itself is not limited to this genre. Rather, children encounter all types of literature as they respond to the challenge of developing writing skills.

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Other Historical Fiction Possibilities

Beatty, Patricia. Blue Stars Watching. New York: William Morrow and Co., 1969.

The story of Will Kinmont who discovers that his father's farm is serving as a way station on the underground railroad. Ask children to add a character, or create a new threat of the plot-escape of the slaves on the underground railroad. How would a different character affect the plot?

Benchley, Nathaniel. Sam the Minuteman. New York: Harper and Row. Publishers, 1969.

Told in third person narrative, this is useful for a writing exercise in which the children rewrite one of the episodes as if they were Sam Brown, his mother or his father.

Clapp, Patricia. Constance. New York: Lothrop, Lee and Shepard, Co., Inc., 1968.

Story of a very outspoken girl who goes to America on the Mayflower with her father after the death of her mother. Written in first person narrative; use to introduce the idea of an account in a journal.

Fritz, Jean. Where Was Patrick Henry on the 29th of May? New York: Coward, McCann and Geoghegan, Inc. 1975.

Fascinating character study useful in helping children understand how an author describes physical and psychological aspects of character. Have children analyze the kinds of information Fritz includes; use as introduction to writing a character study of someone they know.

Fritz, Jean. Why Don't You Get a Horse, Sam Adams? New York: Coward, McCann and Geoghegan, Inc., 1974.

Use this to have children experiments with writing an additional episode about the main character. Write a childhood adventure for Sam, or write about something that happened to him after the book ends.

Holberg, Ruth L. The Girl in the Witch House. New York: Hastings House Publishers, 1966.

Use the description of the school room in this story to help children think about their own school room, preparatory to writing a description of it.

Johnson, Norma. Ready or Not. New York: Funk and Wagnals, Inc., 1965.

Refreshing story of a fifteen year old, Carlier (Carolina), who fights against her own desires to live an active life with her brothers. Her rebellion against being engulfed by other's expectations that she be a "lady," is realistically protrayed.